

on my neck, "Adele, ki-sa-gee-ee-tin oo-ma,"²⁷ making love, always in Indian, only. When we still could. I can't even have him inside me anymore. It's still growing there. The cancer. Pelajia, een-pay-see-see-yan.²⁸

PELAJIA: You know one time, I knew this couple where one of them was dying and the other one was angry at her for dying. And she was mad because he was gonna be there when she wasn't and she had so much left to do. And she'd lie there in bed and tell him to do this and do that and he'd say "Okay, okay." And then he'd go into the kitchen and say to me, "She's so this and she's so that and she's so damned difficult." And I watched all this going on. That house didn't have room for two such angry people. But you know, I said to her, "You gotta have faith in him and you gotta have faith in life. He loves you very much but there's only so much he can do. He's only human." There's only so much Eugene can understand, Marie-Adele. He's only human.

EMILY: Fuckin' right. Me and the Rez sisters, okay? Cruisin' down the coast highway one night. Hum of the engine between my thighs. Rose. That's Rosabella Baez, leader of the pack. We were real close, me and her. She was always thinkin' real deep. And talkin' about bein' a woman. An Indian woman. And suicide. And alcohol and despair and how fuckin' hard it is to be an Indian in this country. (Marie-Adele *shushes her gently*) No goddamn future for them, she'd say. And why, why, why? Always carryin' on like that. Christ'sakes. She was pretty heavy into the drugs. Guess we all were. We had a fight. Cruisin' down the coast highway that night. Rose in the middle. Me and Pussy Commanda off to the side. Big 18-wheeler come along real fast and me and Pussy Commanda get out of the way. But not Rose. She stayed in the middle. Went head-on into that truck like a fly splat against a windshield. I swear to this day I can still feel the spray of her blood against my neck. I drove on. Straight into daylight. Never looked back. Had enough gas money on me to take me far as Salt Lake city. Pawned my bike off and bought me a bus ticket back to Wasy. When I got to Chicago, that's when I got up the nerve to wash my lover's dried blood from off my neck. I loved that woman, Marie-Adele, I loved her like no man's ever loved a woman. But she's gone. I never wanna go back to San Francisco. No way, man.

MARIE-ADELE:

Comforting the crying Emily.

You should get some rest. Let Annie take over.

EMILY: I'll be fine. You go to sleep. Wake you up when we get to Toronto.

Emily puts her Walkman on and starts to sing along quietly to "Blue Kentucky Girl" by Ennylou Harris with its "I swear I love you ..." while Marie-Adele runs her head against the "window" and falls asleep.

²⁷ Adele, I love you. (Cree)

²⁸ Pelajia, I'm scared to death. (Cree)

After a few moments, Zhaboonigan, who has been dozing off between Emily and Marie-Adele in the front seat, pokes her head up and starts to sing along off-key. Then she starts to play with Emily's hair.

EMILY:

Shrugging Zhaboonigan's hand off.

Don't bug me. My favorite part's coming up.

Initiated by Zhaboonigan, they start playing "slap." The game escalates to the point where Emily almost bangs Zhaboonigan over the head with her elbow.

EMILY: Yeah, right. You little retard.

Mad at this, Zhaboonigan hits Emily in the stomach.

Don't hit me there, you little ... Hey, man, like ummm ... I'm sorry, Zha. ZHABOONIGAN: Sorry.

EMILY:

Emily feels her belly thoughtfully. After a brief silence:

You gonna have kids someday, Zha?

ZHABOONIGAN: Ummm ... buy one.

EMILY: Holy! Well, kids were alright. Aw geez, Zha, that man treated me real bad. Ever been tied to a bed post with your arms up like this? Whoa!

Grabbing the steering wheel.

Maybe you should drive.

ZHABOONIGAN: Scary.

EMILY: Aw, don't be scared. Fuck.

ZHABOONIGAN: Fuck.

EMILY: Zhaboonigan Peterson! Your ma'll give me a black eye.

Zhaboonigan turns her head toward the back seat, where Veronique sits sleeping and says one more time, really loud.

ZHABOONIGAN: Fuck!

EMILY: Shhh! Look, Zha. You don't let any man bother you while we're down in T.O. You just stick close to me.

ZHABOONIGAN: Yup.

EMILY: We're sisters right? Gimme five.

They slap hands.

Alright. Bingo!!

Instantly, the house lights come on full blast. The Bingo Master — the most beautiful man in the world — comes running up center aisle, cordless mike in hand, dressed to kill: tails, rhinestones, and all. The entire theatre is now the bingo palace. We are in: Toronto!!!

BINGO MASTER: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the biggest bingo the world has ever seen! Yes, ladies and gentlemen, tonight, we have a very, very special treat for you. Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, you will be witness to events of such gargantuan proportions, such cataclysmic ramifications, such masterly and magnificent manifestations that your minds will reel, your eyes will nictitate, and your hearts will palpitate erratically.

Because tonight, ladies and gentlemen, you will see the biggest, yes, ladies and gentlemen, the very biggest prizes ever known to man, woman, beast, or appliance. And the jackpot tonight? The jackpot, ladies and gentlemen, is surely the biggest, the largest, the hugest, and the most monstrous jackpot ever conceived of in the entire history of monstrous jackpots as we know them. \$500,000! Yes, ladies and gentlemen, \$500,000 can be yours this very night! That's half a million — A HALF MILLION SMACKEROOS!!! IF you play the game right.

And all you have to do, ladies and gentlemen, is reach into your programs and extract the single bingo card placed therein. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the single bingo card placed therein, which bingo card will entitle you to one chance at winning the warm-up game for a prize of \$20. \$20! And all you have to do is poke holes in that single bingo card. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, just poke holes in that single bingo card and bend the numbers backward as the numbers are called. And don't forget the free hole in the middle of the card. Twenty dollars, ladies and gentlemen, that's one line in any direction. That means, of course, ladies and gentlemen, that the first person to form one line, just one straight line in any direction on their card, will be the very lucky winner of the \$20 prize. \$20! Are you ready, ladies and gentlemen? Are you ready? Then let the game begin! Under the G 56. Etc....

The audience plays bingo, with the seven women, who have moved slowly into the audience during the Bingo Master's speech, playing along. Until somebody in the audience shouts, "Bingo!"

BINGO MASTER: Hold your cards, ladies and gentlemen, bingo has been called.

The Bingo Master and the assistant stage manager check the numbers and the prize money is paid out.

BINGO MASTER: And now for the game you've been waiting for, ladies and gentlemen. Now for the big game. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, get ready for THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD! For the grand jackpot prize of \$500,000! Full house, ladies and gentlemen, full house! Are you ready? Are you ready? Then let the game begin!

The house lights go out. And the only lights now are on the bingo balls bouncing around in the bingo machine — an eerie, surreal sort of glow — and on the seven women who are now playing bingo with a vengeance on centerstage, behind the

Bingo Master, where a long bingo table has magically appeared with Zhaboonigan at the table's center banging a crucifix Veronique has brought along for good luck. The scene is lit so that it looks like "The Last Supper."

The women face the audience. The bingo table is covered with all the necessary accoutrements: bags of potato chips, cans of pop, ashtrays (some of the women are smoking), etc. The Bingo Master calls out number after number — but not the B 14 — with the women improvising responses. These responses — Philomena has 27 cards! — grow more and more raucous: "B 14? Annie Cook? One more number to go! The B 14! Where is that B 14? Gimme that B 14! Where the fuck is that B 14?!" etc. Until the women have all risen from the table and come running downstage, attacking the bingo machine and throwing the Bingo Master out of the way. The women grab the bingo machine with shouts of: "Throw this fucking machine into the lake! It's no damn good!" etc. And they go running down center aisle with it and out of the theatre. Bingo cards are flying like confetti. Total madness and mayhem. The music is going crazy.

And out of this chaos emerges the calm, silent image of Marie-Adele waltzing romantically in the arms of the Bingo Master. The Bingo Master says "Bingo" into her ear. And the Bingo Master changes, with sudden bird-like movements, into the nighthawk, Nanabush in dark feathers. Marie-Adele meets Nanabush.

During this next speech, the other women, one by one, take their positions around Marie-Adele's porch, some kneeling, some standing. The stage area, by means of "lighting magic," slowly returns to its Wasaychigan Hill appearance.

MARIE-ADELE: U-wi-nuk u-wa? U-wi-nuk u-wa? Eugene? Neece. U-wi-nuk ma-a oo-ma kee-tha? Ka. Kee-tha i-chi-goo-ma so that's who you are ... at rest upon the rock ... the master of the game ... the game ... it's me ... nee-tha ... come ... come ... don't be afraid ... as-tum ... come ... to ... me ... ever soft wings ... beautiful soft ... soft ... dark wings ... here ... take me ... as-tum ... as-tum ... pee-na-sin ... wings ... here ... take me ... take ... me ... with ... pee-na-sin ...²⁹

As Nanabush escorts Marie-Adele into the spirit world, Zhaboonigan, uttering a cry, makes a last desperate attempt to go with them. But Emily rushes after and catches her at the very last split second. And the six remaining women begin to sing the Ojibway funeral song. By the beginning of the funeral song, we are back at the Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, at Marie-Adele's grave.

²⁹ U-wi-nuk ... pee-na-sin ...] Who are you? Who are you? Eugene? Neece, then who are you really? Oh. It's you, so that's who you are ... at rest upon the rock ... the master of the game ... the game ... it's me ... me ... come ... come ... don't be afraid ... come ... come ... to ... me ... ever soft wings ... beautiful soft ... soft ... darkwings ... here ... take me ... come ... come ... come and get me ... wings here ... take me ... take ... me ... with ... come and get me ... (Cree)

WOMEN: Wa-kwing, wa-kwing.

Wa-kwing nin wi-i-ja;

Wa-kwing, wa-kwing,

Wa-kwing, nin wi-i-ja.³⁰

At Marie-Adele's grave. During Pelajia's speech, the other women continue humming the funeral song until they fade into silence. Pelajia drops a handful of earth on the grave.

PELAJIA: Well, sister, guess you finally hit the big jackpot. Best bingo game we've ever been to in our lives, huh? You know, life's like that, I figure. When all is said and done. Kinda' silly, innit, this business of living? But. What choice do we have? When some fool of a being goes and puts us Indians plunk down in the middle of this old earth, dishes out this lot we got right now. But. I figure we gotta make the most of it while we're here. You certainly did. And I sure as hell am giving it one good try. For you. For me. For all of us. Promise. Really. See you when that big bird finally comes for me.

Whips out her hammer one more time, holds it up in the air and smiles.

And my hammer.

Back at the store in Wasaychigan Hill. Emily is tearing open a brand-new case of the small cans of Carnation milk, takes two cans out and goes up to Zhaboonigan with them.

EMILY: See, Zha? The red part of here and the white part down here and the pink flowers in the middle?

ZHABOONIGAN: Oh.

EMILY: Carnation milk.

ZHABOONIGAN: Carnation milk.

EMILY: And it goes over here where all the other red and white cans are, okay?

ZHABOONIGAN: Yup.

Zhaboonigan rushes to Emily and throws her arms around her affectionately. Emily is embarrassed and struggles to free herself. Just then, Annie enters. She's lost some of her speed and frenetic energy. There's obviously something wrong with her.

ANNIE: Halloo! Hatchyou doing.

EMILY: Red Lucifer's whiskers! It's Annie Cook.

ANNIE: Well, we seem to have survived the biggest bingo in the world, eh? Well ... ummm ... not all of us ... not Marie-Adele ... but she knew she was ... but we're okay. *(Laughs.)* ... us? ...

EMILY: Annie Cook. Sometimes you can be so goddamn ignorant. *(Pause.)* Too bad none of us won, eh.

³⁰ Wa-kwing ... nin wi-i-ja] Heaven, heaven, I'm going there; Heaven, heaven,

heaven, I'm going there. *(Ojibway)*

ANNIE: Philomena Moosemeat won \$600. That's something.

EMILY: Yup. That's one helluva jazzy toilet she's got there, eh?

ANNIE: She's got eight-ply toilet paper. Dark green. Feels like you're wiping your ass with moss!

EMILY: Holy!

ANNIE: I'm singing back-up for Fritz weekends. 25 bucks a gig. That's something, eh?

EMILY: Karz's whore ...

ANNIE: What?

EMILY: You heard me.

ANNIE: The Karz's what?

EMILY: Chrissakes. Wake up.

ANNIE: I love him, Emily.

EMILY: You been drinkin'.

ANNIE: Please, come with me tonight.

EMILY: Have to wait for the old buzzard to come pick up this dozy daughter of hers and that's not 'til seven.

ANNIE: Okay?

EMILY: Alright. But we're comin' right back to the Rez soon as the gig's over. Hear?

ANNIE: Thanks. Any mail today?

EMILY: Sorry.

ANNIE: That's okay. See you at seven.

And she exits.

ZHABOONIGAN: Why ... why ... why do you call me that?

EMILY: Call you what?

ZHABOONIGAN: Dozy dotter.

Awkward silence, broken after awhile by Zhaboonigan's little giggle.

EMILY: Look, Zha. Share a little secret with you, okay?

ZHABOONIGAN: Yup.

EMILY: Just you and me, promise?

ZHABOONIGAN: Yup.

EMILY: Gazelle Nataways'll see fit to kill ... but I'm gonna have a baby.

ZHABOONIGAN:

Drops the Carnation milk cans she's been holding all this time and gasps.

Ohhh! Big Joey!

EMILY:

In exasperation.

This business of having babies ...

And the last we see of them is Zhaboonigan playfully poking Emily in the belly and Emily slapping Zhaboonigan's hand away.

At Eugene Starblanket's house. Veronique St. Pierre is sitting on the steps, glowing with happiness, looking up at the sky as though looking for seagulls. She sees none so she picks up the doll that lies under her chair and cradles it on her lap as though it were a child. At this point, Annie Cook enters.

ANNIE: Hallooo!

Surprised to see Veronique sitting there.

Veronique St. Pierre. What are you doing here?

VERONIQUE: Annie Cook. Haven't you heard I'm cooking for Eugene and the children these days? It's been four days since the funeral as you know may she rest in peace *(Makes a quick sign of the cross without missing beat.)* but I was the only person on this reserve who was willing to help with these 14 little orphans.

ANNIE: That's nice. But I came to see if Simon Star ...

VERONIQUE: The stove is so good. All four elements work and there is even a timer for the oven. As I was saying to Black Lady Halked at the bingo last night, "Now I don't have to worry about burning the fried potatoes or serving the roast beef half-raw."

ANNIE: Well, I was about to ...

VERONIQUE: Yes, Annie Cook. I bought a roast beef just yesterday. A great big roast beef. Almost 16 pounds. It's probably the biggest roast beef that's been seen on this reserve in recent years. The meat was so heavy that Nicky, Ricky, Ben, and Mark had to take turns carrying it here for me. Oh, it was hard and slippery at first, but I finally managed to wrestle it into my oven. And it's sitting in there at this very moment just sizzling and bubbling with the most succulent and delicious juices. And speaking of succulent and delicious juices, did you come to call on Eugene? Well, Eugene's not home.

ANNIE: Yeah, right. I came to see if Simon had that new record.

VERONIQUE: Why?

ANNIE: I'm singing in Little Current tonight and I gotta practice this one song.

VERONIQUE:

Contemptuously.

That Ritzie Ditzie character.

ANNIE: It's Fritz the Katz, Veronique St. Pierre. FREDERICK STEPHEN KATZ. He's a very fine musician and a good teacher.

VERONIQUE: Teacher?! Of what?! As I was saying to Little Girl Manitowabi and her daughter June Bug McLeod at the bingo last night, "You never know about these non-Native bar-room types." I said to them, "We have enough trouble right here on this reserve without having our women come dragging these shady white characters into the picture." Before you know it, you will end up in deep trouble and bring shame and disrespect on the name of Pelajia Patchnose and all your sisters, myself included.

ANNIE: Myself included, my ass! Veronique St. Pierre. I wish you would shut that great big shirty mouth of yours at least once a year!

VERONIQUE:

Stunned into momentary silence. Then.

Simon Starblanket is not home.

With this, she bangs the doll down viciously.

ANNIE: Good day, Veronique St. Pierre.

And exits.

Veronique, meanwhile, just sits there in her stunned state, mouth hanging open and looking after the departing Annie.

On Pelajia Patchnose's roof. As at the beginning of the play, Pelajia is alone, nailing shingles on. But no cushion this time.

PELAJIA: Philomena. Where are those shingles?

PHILOMENA:

From offstage.

Oh, go on. I'll be up in just a minute.

PELAJIA:

Coughs.

The dust today. It's these dirt roads. Dirt roads all over. Even the main street.

If I were chief around here, that's the very first thing I would do is ...

PHILOMENA:

Coming up the ladder with one shingle and the most beautiful pink, lace-embroidered, heart-shaped pillow you'll ever see.

Oh, go on. You'll never be chief.

PELAJIA: And why not?

PHILOMENA: Because you're a woman.

PELAJIA: Bullshit! If that useless old chief of ours was a woman, we'd see a few things get done around here. We'd see our women working, we'd see our men working, we'd see our young people sober on Saturday nights, and we'd see Nanabush dancing up and down the hill on shiny black paved roads.

Annie Cook pops up at the top of the ladder.

ANNIE: Pelajia for chief! I'd vote for you.

PHILOMENA: Why, Annie Cook. You just about scared me off the edge of this roof.

PELAJIA: Someday, we'll have to find you a man who can slow you down. So what do you want this time, Annie Cook?

ANNIE: Well, to tell you the truth, I came to borrow your record player, Philomena Moosemeat ... I mean, Moosetail. I'm going to practice this one song for tonight. Emily Dictionary is coming to Little Current to watch me sing with the band.

PELAJIA: It's back from Espanola.

PHILOMENA:

To Pelajia.

Pelajia Rosella Patchnose!

To Annie.

It's still not working very well. There's a certain screeching, squawking noise that comes out of it every time you try to play it.

PELAJIA: That's okay, Philomena. There's a certain screechy, squawky noise that comes out of Annie Cook every time she opens her mouth to sing anyway.

PHILOMENA: Yes, Annie Cook. You can borrow it. But only for one night.

ANNIE: Good. Hey, there's a bingo in Espanola next week and Fire Minklater is driving up in her new car. There might be room.

To Philomena:

Would you like to go?

PELAJIA: Does a bear shit in the woods?

PHILOMENA:

Glares at Pelajia first.

Yes.

Then quickly to Annie.

Make ... make sure you don't leave me behind.

ANNIE: I'll make sure. Well. Toodle-oo!

And she pops down the ladder again, happy, now that she's finally got her record player.

PELAJIA: That Annie Cook. Records and bingo. Bingo and records.

PHILOMENA: You know, Pelajia, I'd like to see just what this Fritz looks like. Maybe he IS the man who can slow her down, after all.

PELAJIA: Foolishness! Annie Cook will be walking fast right up until the day she dies and gets buried beside the two of us in that little cemetery beside the church.

PHILOMENA: Oh, go on.

Pause. As Philomena sits down beside her sister, leaning with her elbow on her heart-shaped pillow.

So, Pelajia Patchnose. Still thinking about packing your bags and shipping off to Toronto?

PELAJIA: Well ... oh ... sometimes. I'm not so sure I would get along with him if I were to live down there. I mean my son Tom. He was telling me not to play so much bingo.

PHILOMENA: His upstairs washroom. Mine looks just like it now.

PELAJIA: Here we go again.

PHILOMENA: Large shining porcelain tiles in hippity-hoppity squares of black and white ... so clean you can see your own face, like in a mirror, when you lean over to look into them. It looks so nice. The shower curtains have a certain matching blackness and whiteness to them — they're made of a rich, thick, plastic sort of material — and they're see-through in parts. The bathtub is beautiful, too. But the best, the most wonderful, my absolute most favorite part is the toilet bowl itself. First of all, it's elevated, like on a sort of ... pedestal, so that it makes you feel like ... the Queen ... sitting on her royal throne, ruling her Queendom with a firm yet gentle hand. And the bowl itself — white, spirit white — is of such a shape, such an exquisitely soft, perfect oval shape that it makes you want to cry. Oh!!! And it's so comfortable you could just sit on it right up until the day you die!

After a long, languorous pause, Philomena snaps out of her reverie when she realizes that Pelajia, all this time, has been looking at her disbelievingly and then contemptuously. Pelajia cradles her hammer as though she'd like to bang Philomena's head with it. Philomena delicately starts to descend the ladder. The last we see of her is her Keupie-doll face. And beside it, the heart-shaped pillow, disappearing like a setting sun behind the edge of the roof. Once she's good and gone. Pelajia dismisses her.

PELAJIA: Oh, go on!

Then she pauses to look wistfully at the view for a moment.

Not many seagulls flying over Eugene Starblanket's house today.

And returns once more to her hammering on the roof as the lights fade into black-out. Split seconds before complete black-out, Nanabush, back once more in his guise as the seagull, "lands" on the roof behind the unaware and unseeing Pelajia Patchnose. He dances to the beat of the hammer, merrily and triumphantly.

END OF PLAY.